

FAMILY TRANSITION AT MARRIAGE 131 561

Marriage transfers the boy into the adult farm-owning man, the farm father into the old man; it brings the same changes for the women. Such changes are, of course, not abrupt; the groups which are substantially of the same age do not undergo disruption with the movement of one of their number from status of boy to that of man. But, on the other hand, there are general patterns of behavior which mark off these groupings in an informal manner, and which betray their origin in a social valuation of age differences. 581 885 886

The behavior of the different age groups is of the most intimate everyday kind, and consequently reflects those differentiations of status which are given formal and explicit recognition at marriage. Felt to be too natural a part of daily life to require explanation on the part of the farmers themselves, their behavior, nevertheless, is very easily remarked by the observer. In the ordinary countryman's house, for example, the man of the house and whatever older men may be present occupy chairs drawn up before the hearth. The hob by the fire belongs to the old couple by right. The younger people, the sons and daughters, sit behind them round the room on other chairs or on the window seats of the rectangular kitchen, which makes up the principal room of the usual small farmer's house. This arrangement shows itself best in the *cuaire* or visit, where the old men of the district drop in on neighbors and "friends" to sit around the hearth together passing the evenings of winter in conversation, singing, discussing the news, and telling the old stories of legend and folklore. At the *cuaire* younger men and women, if they attend, sit behind, usually leaving the center of the stage to the old men, and the children stand up behind in silent admiration. The younger men have their own pursuits, of course, though at present the divergence may be more marked than formerly. Lately, in Clare at least, they have taken to card playing on a gambling basis for stakes of small livestock in the country districts. 561 574 576 517 525 178

THE PROBLEM OF THE AGED

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When the authors first made their way into the small farm communities which they came to know best, they were plunged into a mass of observation which, without knowledge of the valuations of the community upon age, had no interpretation. Night after night, the day's work done, their new acquaintances, at least the males among them, walked out upon the roads to this house and that in search of recreation and companionship. Mention of dances, "gambles," "hooleys," sings, *ceilidhthe*, filled our ears, belying the impression of a gray monotony of rural life too easily gathered by town-bred minds. Some of these sportive events were age-old survivals of ancient custom, like the bonfires of St. John's Eve. Others were nearly as ancient celebrations of crucial events in individual and family life, such as wakes, christenings, weddings. But many others were less occasional and less specialized gatherings, and others wore a very modern dress: a turkey raffle and a dance round a gramophone.

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But our interest was soon caught by distinctions of participation, rather than those of kind. The people of the village participated variously. Different groups met more or less regularly at specific houses.

For instance, the "old fellows" went out on *cuaird*, as they called their visiting to join one another. They followed a deep-set regular habit. As they phrased it, "a man would feel lonely if he didn't go out on *cuaird*." In most communities, they usually convened at a particular house. Often their gatherings bore particular names. In one North Clare community, Rynamona by name, the old men's meeting was known as the *Dáil*. Before the Free State, it had been the "parliament." The name is a jocular one, of course, but it is expressive of the participants' evaluation of themselves nonetheless.

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The young men know the *Dáil* as the "old men's house." They stay away. One of the cronies of Rynamona put the

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● 517 matter most clearly when he described the old men's gathering
573 from its members' point of view:

387 It wouldn't suit [for the young men to come]. They gather in at Jack Roche's and they laugh and joke and play cards. They talk about the next gamble and the next dance, and that is all they know. It is a lot of codology [nonsense, buncombe]. It is only the old men, the men with families and a responsibility on them, they are the ones that come. And in our own way we learn a great deal. If you advance any argument, you must be prepared to defend it from all attack, and John Roche, "the public prosecutor," will ask you questions till he is sure it is right or wrong. Then some evening we have real discussions in which we settle problems. Other times we discuss farming. It wouldn't suit for the young men to come in, but, when we get old and they get married, then they will gather and talk about this and that. That is the way it always has been and that is the way it always will be. There is never any bad blood between any of the village, and one reason is because we talk things over.

This statement on the old men's gathering imparts a deeper reality to what appears to be merely a companionable pastime of the old men. The evening *cuaird* of the old men takes on an institutional flavor. It is a clique, of course, a tightly knit group of males of similar interests and similar status, giving rise to nicknames within itself which, as in the case here mentioned of the public prosecutor, express the members' position in the internal arrangement of the group. It has a definite meeting place and meeting time. It excludes those of dissimilar traits; in this instance, the young men. But it is a clique which operates within a traditional setting: "That is the way it always has been and is the way it always will be."

It is a clique, too, which performs a function for a larger group than those who make it up. In this case it is claimed for it, at least, that it prevents bad blood in the local community.

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audience. The point of importance here is that it is among 887
the old people that folk myth and folk belief are preserved 538
and expressed for the community.

If we are to examine in full rural behavior based upon 571
age and its connection with the old adult clique whose 517 ●
function in the community we are assessing, we must offer
some contrast with the behavior of other age groups.

We have already mentioned that the old men's house in
Rynamona was not the only seat of visiting after the day's
work, and that the entertainment provided there was merely
one instance of many gatherings taking place almost nightly,
at least through the winter, in rural communities. In the
statements given by older men about the meeting of the
young men we have seen something of the manner in which
other pursuits than those of the men's house are regarded.

Indeed in all the communities which came under the
authors' notice the young men were as ardent evening visi-
tors as were the older men. In Rynamona they were no
less so.

There they gathered in most often at the house of Roche,
the "prosecutor." They did this from long habit, as did
their elders. But they had no larger justification for their
doing so. They went because "you never feel the time
passing when you're in with the boys." But there were
marked differences in their meeting. There was no central
clique so closely integrated as that in O'Donoghue's house.
There were pairs of lads, brothers, friends, and groups of
three and four and five who habitually played cards or
walked the roads together.

A greater difference lay in their complete lack of concern
with the affairs of the community. One could get them to [521]
talk only about their own plans or the trials of their own
kind and age. There was no debate, no reaching of deci-
sions, no appeal to tradition. The skills upon which those
taking part in the meetings prided themselves and for which

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571 they received their nicknames were of other sorts. Not even
517 farming occupied a large share of their conversation, keen
as their rivalry in the matter often was while work was
going on.

571 Taking these matters in order, the young men who met
517 at Roche's house met habitually there for card playing.
524 Roche's unmarried son, a man about thirty, was perhaps
the central figure. His cousin, another Roche, was the
brother of a young man just married, who took part in no
cuaird. This cousin helped work his brother's farm. He
was another central figure. The group that formed itself
round them included most of the young men of Rynamona
between the ages of twenty and thirty. They played the
usual games of the Irish countryside, "forty-five" and "nap,"
often far into the night.

571 Roche's house was the more informal center. It took in
517 the younger men. But there was present in the community
525 a custom somewhat more organized, namely, the "gamble."
As often as once a week a gamble is held in or near Ryna-
mona. Each household, as its turn comes, throws open its
doors to the card players. Admission, usually a shilling, is
charged and goes toward defraying the expense of the
supper of bread and tea for all and toward the prize. What
is left after those charges are met belongs to the house-
holder. Often this amount reaches a profitable figure, and,
where the custom is firmly entrenched, a certain commercial-
ism shows its head.

But the gamble is a sporting event. Teams, often formed
of habitual associates in card playing, are pitted against one
another in one form of the gamble. In another, individual
high scorers win. The prize is usually a turkey or two geese,
even a bonham (young pig), a side of bacon, or a calf. Elab-
[555] orate rules and canons of honesty govern the play, the
conduct of the players, and the obligation of the person
offering the prize. Play is serious and intense, and the win-

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ner of the prize can count himself a proud man, for to be known in the countryside as a "great gambler" is a coveted mark of shrewdness and skill. 571 195 517 525 555

The older men seldom attend the gambles. They are the province of the young. For the latter, they are a crystallization of the more informal card playing, such as that at Roche's house, already described, and they give the successful young men a prestige in the community ordinarily denied them. For in late years tournaments have sprung up covering whole sections of the county and it is a proud team which can bring back a five or ten pound district prize to its home community. 587 554

From the standpoint of an enumeration of those taking part in the gambles, too, the gambles show themselves to be such a crystallization. They bring into association on more definite occasions the groups, such as that at Roche's house, which meet habitually. They unite most of the young men, especially the more active among them, with a few of the older. But it is from the young men's world of habit that their union is created.

In Rynamona the young men who gathered nightly at Roche's house were the mainstays of the gambles. They could be counted upon to attend all of them. They played well and long, as they had learned the games among themselves. But they were not the only ones to come. Most of the slightly older men of what we shall call the intermediate *cuaird*, to be described later, such as John Quin, the newcomer to the old men's house already named, came from time to time, and there was always a sprinkling of young men, kinsfolk, and "friends" from near-by communities. It was only the members of the old men's house who stayed away. They alone had given up the habits of young men. To them the gamble was "codology."

Thus the first point of difference between the visiting habits of the old men and the young men, their lack of cen- 571 517

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571 tral clique, is not without wider interest. The young men
517 are more numerous, and they group themselves together as
much as do the old. But it is upon a different basis. It is a
[573] synthesis in a looser, more widely inclusive, gathering which
unites smaller cliques of brothers, friends, and boon com-
panions. The gamble is only one of many entertainments
571 they provide themselves. Equally frequently they hold a
517 dance. The country dance is undergoing change in rural
535 Ireland today, but it is still much as it was in the last cen-
tury, although it may not enliven the country districts as
often as it did. Irish square dances, jigs, and flings, most
of them variations of sixteenth-century European dance
forms, are most common, although some Gaelic-speaking
districts preserve an older tradition.

621 The country dance belongs to the young people. It differs
535 from the gamble, from the standpoint of participants, in
that it unites both sexes. In most communities it is an
517 affair in which the whole community takes part, the old
people as onlookers, the young and the still spry among
the older ones as performers. In late years the more formal
"all night" dance, an organized dance for which admission
is charged and from which the older people are usually
absent, has made its appearance. Like the gamble it draws
from a wider area.

517 But there is a good deal of the spontaneous dancing which
535 springs up wherever the young people of the community
gather even today. The young men and women learn the
skills required and value them. There are elaborate codes
of etiquette round them and a wealth of proverbs and jocular
superstitions. But here again, unlike the behavior
followed in the old men's house, these conducts have little
larger purpose than uniting the scattered cliques of young
people. They are recreations. They are ends in themselves.
They are good times that pass the time.

517 The gamble and the dance do not, of course, exhaust the
571 list. The young people have other activities, games, sports,

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contests, and playful roles of solemn occasions, such as acting
as strawboys (mummers) at weddings. But all these activi-
ties, in which the old members of the community do not
directly participate, are alike in their playing no great part
in organizing other elements in the community than the
young people themselves. They serve other functions.

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All these activities bind the young men, the young people,
together in common interests. They provide them with a
scope of action in which they are comparatively free, yet
which keeps them divorced from the seats of a power over
community life which is denied them. In this sphere they
may develop complex norms, valuations, and conducts.

But such developments do not serve primarily to knit the
community as a whole the more firmly. They are associated
with the lesser prestige of the young people. Consequently,
the old men's house comes to have in contrast a double
function. It unites the old men in much the same way as
the gamble and the dance unite the young men, in fact
even more strongly. But it does so in terms of the old
men's common position as recipients of the respect of the
community and in terms of their individual positions as
integrators of their families. The difference is structural.
The activities of young men unite them across family and
clique lines even from one community to the next. But
those of the old men do more; they unite young and old
as well. The integration of the young men is a looser and
less inclusive one, even though the numbers ephemerally
joined in gamble and dance may be greater.

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In such a system of integrations, that of the old men has
the greater prestige. A great gambler or a great dancer wins
wide respect. But the distinction is short-lived. It is a nine
days' or a nine years' wonder. It bestows great prestige
among one's fellows, but it removes one very little, if at
all, from one's subordinate, less valued place as "boy" in
the community.

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Where such is the case, the individual's progression

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own sex than otherwise, except in the house itself. Except upon ceremonial occasions in family life or in the considerable affluence of owning a gig or a trap or a motorcar, in Clare at least they go to mass, to town, or to sportive gatherings with companions of their own sex. Till recently and even now in remote districts, a conventional peasant woman always kept several paces behind her man, even if they were walking somewhere together.

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The women do not go out on *cuaird* like the men. Their sphere of interest and influence is better confined within the family circle. Women do not take part directly in the deliberations of such cliques as that described in the old men's house at Rynamona. On the other hand, they are not in the least excluded or treated lightly or in a derogatory fashion. At the old men's *cuaird* the woman of the house is nearly always present. Her being of the company does not seem to stem the flow of talk in the slightest. She remains silent or is ignored so long as their talk deals with the world of the men's interest. But when the talk swings around to her sphere, she is consulted and is ready to take an active part.

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The girls, of course, the unmarried younger women and adolescents, keep to themselves and form cliques and smaller groups of neighbors and kinswomen among themselves. Occasionally a dance breaks the ordinary succession of work and evening talk in the kitchen. And then, in their more restricted place, they are ready to go about under the tutelage of parent or brother to meet the young men and boys of the community.

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All this is nothing new and has been described before. Yet one must review it, because in it one can see the existence of statuses of the kind we have demonstrated before. Old woman, married young woman, and girl, each term is a status in the countryside, in the same manner as in the cases of the boys and men we have already presented. The

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BOYS AND MEN

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Where is the woman today who
 could shoulder a creel of turf a hundred yards out⁵²¹
 through the bog mud to the famine road, before⁵⁶¹
 the Board put in the road to the bog above Dunna-⁸⁸⁸
 gore? [482]

Often the expressions take a different turn. They⁵¹⁷ ●
 become that universal complaint—the younger⁵²¹
 generation. “Young people aren’t what they used⁵⁶¹
 to be,” said one old farmer in the course of a⁸⁸⁸
 general discussion of the golden age that was his
 youth. “They spend money for fags, they have to
 be gambling every night, or else to a dance, and
 if they happen to win a turkey they will nearly
 shake the house down [in their triumph]. There is
 no good in the country when things go on like
 this. In the old days a man used always be out
 repairing his stone walls, cleaning his land, or
 doing something. Now you can’t get them to do
 anything unless you pay them.”

Here he paused for an illustration, chose one⁵⁶¹
 from among his own cronies, and swept volubly on.⁵²¹
 “Wasn’t old Keane out every night with his cattle⁸⁸⁸
 and he putting them in small fields and late in the^[291]
 night? Wasn’t he up early in the morning and out
 working? They cleared a nice piece of land in the
 common. He kept at it till he had cattle all the way
 up by Ballyvaughan. You wouldn’t get any of the
 young people to do that now. There’s no controlling
 them.”

Discussions of the present fall into the same vein.
 The past, for the older members of the community,

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I; call back the old man. He was just a few paces down the road. She did, and his face lighted up and he couldn't thank her enough."

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Informal as these differences are, they are nevertheless powerful agents in the regulation of conduct among small farmers. Without them the flavour of rural life is lost. Without them, too, one can gain no understanding of the continual round of informal activities of social intercourse which fill the non-working lives of the countrymen. For the country-people have their entertainments, like their more sophisticated urban contemporaries. The student of society cannot afford to dismiss them as inconsequential. They are often important controls of human activity.

When my colleagues and I first made our way into the rural communities we were to come to know best, we were plunged into a mass of observations which seemed to have no interpretation. Night after night, their day's work done, our new acquaintances, at least the males among them, walked out upon the roads to this house and that in search of recreation and companionship. Mention of dances, gambles, sings, *ceilidhthe*, filled our ears, belying the impression of a gray monotony of rural life too easily gathered by town-bred minds. Some of these sportive gatherings were age-old customs like the bonfires of St. John's Eve; others celebrated crucial events, such as wakes, christenings, weddings. But many others were less occa-

sional and less specialized gatherings; and others⁵⁶¹
again wore a very modern dress: a turkey raffle and⁵¹⁷
a dance round a gramophone.

But our interest was soon caught by distinctions of participation, rather than those of kind. The personalities of the 'village' participated variously, different groups met more or less regularly at specific houses.

For instance, the 'old fellows' went out on⁵¹⁷
cuaird, as they called their visiting, to join one⁵⁶¹
another. They followed a deep-set regular habit.⁵⁷³
As they phrased it "a man would feel lonely if he didn't go out on *cuaird*".

In most communities they usually convened at a particular house. Often their gatherings bore particular names. In one North Clare community, Rynamona by name, the old men's meeting was known as the 'Dáil'. Before the Free State, it had been the 'parliament'. The name is a jocular one, of course, but as we shall see, it is expressive of the participants' evaluation of themselves, none the less.

The young men know the 'Dái' as the 'old men's house'; they stay away. One of the cronies of Rynamona put the matter most clearly, when he described the old men's gathering from its members' point of view:

"It wouldn't suit [for the young men to come]," he said. "They gather in at Jack Roche's and they laugh and joke and play cards; they talk about the

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blood between any of the village, and one reason is
because we talk things over."

The statement, then, imparts a deeper reality to
what appears at first sight to be merely a com-
panionable pastime of the older men. This meeting
of theirs is a clique, a tightly knit group of males of
similar status and interests. It is strong enough and
binding enough to bestow nicknames upon its
members as in the case of the 'public prosecutor'.
But it is a clique, too, which operates within a
traditional setting. It has a function to perform for
others than the cronies who make it up. The
speaker claims for it at least that it prevented bad
blood in the village.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

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Mayo a ploughman would be called in to shake a woman at a difficult childbirth, presumably because it is he who prepares the ground and shakes the seed which brings new life to the fields. *It is stated that in* 845

Music, dancing, games and dramatic performances also played their part in the seasonal gatherings, and one may hazard the guess that the Irishman's passion for betting derives from this source. A ritual element, as in the wake games mentioned in the previous chapter, can often be detected, for example in the following account taken from the source quoted above. It describes a May game or pantomime from the Louth-Armagh border, modified survivals of which were current through most of the 19th century in the Slieve Gullion district. "On May day the figure of a female is made up, fixed upon a short pole and dressed in a fantastic manner, with flowers, ribbons, etc. This figure they call 'The May Baby.' Around it a man and woman (generally his wife) dressed also fantastically with straw, dance to the sound of a fiddle and entertain the people with indecent shows and postures, the figure at the same time being kept moving by the rustic maiden that supports it. These exhibitions cause great merriment among the assembled populace; women who have had no children also attend (some of them from a considerable distance) to see this figure and exhibition, which they imagine will promote fruitfulness in them, and cause them to have children. Money is collected, and when the actors and musician have received some remuneration the remainder is laid out in drink, and the evening passes by jovially." This magic pantomime was originally intended to secure the success of the year's crops. 536
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Such rites and gatherings have gradually been suppressed or won over by the Church; and Sunday evening is now the favourite recreation time for dancing and games. Among the older games, hurley is most popular, and horse-racing has by no means lost its appeal although it has suffered like other amusements from commercial exploitation. On many a 517
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517 sea-strand, hurley, horse-racing and games have drawn
526 together large crowds at certain seasons of the year, and in summer there were also boat or curragh races. These have by no means lost their appeal: one may instance the gatherings at Omey Island, Co. Mayo. If bull-baiting, doubtless a relic of ceremonial bull-fights, is now dead, cock-fighting is still secretly indulged in, while the illegal "long bullets,"¹ played with a heavy ball along the roads of Co. Armagh and Co. Cork—a curious distribution, for I have not come across it elsewhere—is still popular, and though Wakefield seems to attribute it to English influence it recalls the skill of the Irish peasantry in stone-throwing. This was, legend tells us, one of the playful habits of the giants of old, and a phrase used of the Aran Islands—"quarrels usually end in stone-throwing"—would not be inapplicable to some Irish cities during the "troubles." In the Claddagh of Galway a favourite amusement, turned at times into its original use as "a mode of warfare," used to be casting stones with slings. "When a man was able to strike a shilling as far away as it could be seen, he was considered a good shot." O'Curry states that it was the custom of the ancient Irish to use a flat circular stone in warfare: it was carried in the hollow of the shield.

526 Games which have kept their seasonal character are still played at Hallowe'en, especially that known as "diving for apples." "Riding and shoeing the wooden mare" is perhaps no longer played, but we must repeat that it is rarely safe to speak of old customs as extinct in rural Ireland. It has more than once been my experience to come across habits and beliefs which were described as dead half a century ago. Certain
534 toys should also find a place in this brief summary: there is,
524 for instance, the "bull-roarer," a thin lath of wood with serrated edges which is swung round on a string so as to

¹ An interesting account of bullet throwing is given by Michael J. Murphy in *At Slieve Gullion's Foot*, 1941, p. 78. Both iron and stone bullets were home-made, and the writer describes how the latter were fashioned in "bullet-holes" resembling the ancient cup-marks mentioned above on p. 164. The game was also played round Dunleer, Co. Louth, fifty years ago, but in the Cork style, that is by overhand "bowling."

164 very even and white, and seem to last well; even men of over sixty
[142] often have good incisors; but many suffer from toothache. Abscess
of the alveolus, unlike what is seen in Aran, is not at all common.

Skin.—Ulcers due to the friction of ropes and of the thick home-spun clothing when wet, eczema, "sea-boils," scabies, and acne, are frequently met with, as is anthrax or carbuncle; but, perhaps, the most common of all skin affections, especially among the younger members of the population, is tinea tonsurans. Alopecia areata, whether caused by the last-mentioned affection or not, seems to be common. Uterine troubles are not at all common. Venereal diseases are practically unknown.

164 - *Accidents* arising out of the surroundings and occupation of the
752 people are, as might be expected, very numerous. These are burns, severe cuts from reaping hooks, injuries inflicted by domestic animals, and, above all, confusions and fractures due in most cases to falls from rocks and ponies.

181 4. *Psychology.*—For one who has had only a short experience of the people this very difficult and delicate point is exceedingly hard to deal justly with, but the following description, for the most part obtained from local sources, both on the islands and on the opposite part of the mainland, and to some small degree from personal observation, is believed to be accurate as far as it goes.

[609] To strangers, the people are not, at first, attractive, as their manner is shy and not unmarked by suspicion; but after this reserve is broken through they reveal themselves in a much more attractive light, and are kindly, courteous, and very communicative.

● [517] Among themselves they are cheerful and social, given much to gossip and chaff, though their wit is not of a very sparkling character. They contrast strongly with the Aran Islanders in their taste for music and dancing, concertinas and melodions being in common use in several houses.

181 In their dealings with one another they are honest and fair, even
674 a petty theft being an extremely rare occurrence. As to their dealings
[609] with the people of the mainland, the usual hostile statements, common with all insular communities, are made by both sides with respect to each others honesty, but much reliance cannot be put in these vague assertions. Crime is almost unknown, and the administration of justice is seldom called into requisition, and then only for small quarrels among neighbours.

181 sources, my informants being those who are brought into close contact with the everyday life of the people. So far as it goes it is believed to be accurate. No attempt has been made to do otherwise than describe the actual state of the case, and while the faults of the people are not extenuated, yet any circumstances which may explain these are given as far as possible, and their good qualities are believed to be stated without exaggeration.

181 To the casual visitor the people, on acquaintance, are decidedly
609 attractive; in the outlying parts of the district, it is true, they are at first rather suspicious of strangers, but after a short time are very obliging and communicative, ready to show anything of interest in their neighbourhood, and hospitable to the best of their power. The natives of both the islands at Inishkea, are very hospitable and kindly to strangers, of whom they are, however, rather distrustful, a visitor being welcomed into their houses, and entertained with the best they can give. With each other they seem in all parts of the district to be much given to chaff and joking of a more or less practical nature, and their sense of the ridiculous seems to be rather keen. In times of trouble or distress they are very kind, generous with what they have, and helpful to one another.

181 They are fond of music, dancing, and bright colours, and more
● 517 than one song-maker in their own tongue, the Irish, has been a native
53 of this district; amongst these was the celebrated Dick Barrett, several of whose productions have been collected and published. In common with most of the people of our rural districts, there do not seem to be many traces of artistic taste, and a native art is conspicuous by its absence. One or two instances of attempted decoration were observed in Inishkea, none on the mainland.

181 On the whole, though cases of dishonesty and sharp practice in
577 bargaining occur, they are honest in their dealings with one another. As is often the case in remote districts, the people of one locality are sometimes on strained relations with those of another; thus there exists a certain amount of jealousy and distrust between the natives of the two Inishkeas, while the people of the mainland do not readily amalgamate with those of either island.

181 As regards intelligence, they are extremely sharp and shrewd,
691 and seem rather fond of argumentation. There is but little crime, with the exception of illicit distillation and drunkenness, but the people are very litigious, going to law with each other about slight trespasses and similar matters. This tendency is not by any means of recent origin, but has been remarked on by several writers. Maxwell

BALLY AND BOOLEY

361 narrow strip between the boundary and the wall. 'Fights, tres-
 578 passes, confusion, disputes and assaults, were the natural and
 311 unavoidable consequences of the rundale system.'¹ On the other
 423 hand we must recall the extreme reluctance with which the
 system was at last abandoned, the social benefits it conferred
 on members of the kin. The reforming landlord, Lord George
 Hill, comments that 'the pleasure the people feel in assembling
 and chatting together, made them consider the removal of the
 houses, from the clusters or hamlets in which they were
 generally built to the separate farms, a great grievance.'²
 Another writer gives as the basis of the tenants' grievance,
 'the recollection of nights of social concourse, of aid in sickness,
 [517] of sympathy in joy and sorrow, of combined operations of
 defence against bailiff or gauger'.³ There were ceilidhes and
 spinning parties, and many a clachan had its shanachie (story-
 teller) and its fiddler or piper—usually a maimed or simple
 person—who accompanied with folk-tunes. Folk-songs, occu-
 pational airs and legendary tales were kept alive in this way.
 Apart from the co-operation implicit in the openfield system
 there was a good deal of sharing in other ways. Thus there
 [252] would be a communal corn-kiln for drying the grain before
 grinding, a knocking stone for pounding barley, and in some
 [343] districts a corbelled stone sweat-house which took the place
 of the village doctor in treating rheumatic pains.

The openfield which lay around the cluster, normally on the
 311 down-hill side so that the vital manure could be 'sliped' down-
 423 slope (see Chapter XIII), seems to have been kept in cultivation
 in some areas at least year after year. This was the infield, in
 contrast to the outfield, the outlying rough pasture bits of
 which were temporarily reclaimed and then left to rest for long
 periods. We shall return to the plough and spade and methods
 of cultivation in another place but may refer here to the allot-
 ment of the holdings in the common fields. Although in many
 parts of the country the holdings, by the end of the eighteenth
 century, had become fixed in their scattered parcels on the
 several qualities of land in the openfield, there is abundant

¹Lord George Hill, *Gweedore*, 22.²*ibid.*, 42.³W. R. Wilde, *Dublin University Magazine*, 41 (1858), 20.

HOME-MADE THINGS

285 ancient origin. We shall see that it is the way the Boyne
415 curraghs are built, and it is said that the African pygmies make
their carrying baskets in similar fashion. For lightness and to
facilitate lifting one or more rows of open 'windows' are left
in the sides of the creels. Those used for seaweed were some-
times quite open in construction, and like the manure pots they
were generally fitted with hinged bottoms for unloading (Fig.
56).

901 Besides their utilitarian uses, rushes, grasses and straw have
524 long been playthings for young folk who fashion out of them,
285 for love or for luck, many varieties of decorations and emblems.
We describe the Briget's Crosses elsewhere (Fig. 85). Harvest
[832] knots, twisted out of the ripe straw of harvest, seem formerly
to have been in truth love tokens, though now worn merely as
buttonholes for the harvest fair (Plate 15). As one might
expect, the girls' knots were the more ornate and they differed
from those worn by the boys in having the ears left attached.
Some exceptionally fine specimens are fashioned out of flax or
fine wild grasses. Star-shaped emblems in these materials are
also made (Fig. 70). More complicated knots have four or six
strand work, but the ordinary knots are in two ply, made by
bending the straws sharply over each other at right angles.
Before being knotted they make tolerably strong cords: I have
experimented with these on unbaked clay pots and find that
when impressed in the soft clay they make very good imitations
of the 'cord impressions' seen on Bronze Age pottery. I have
heard that in Nigeria the same two-ply technique is employed
in making roulettes, from the fibres of the wine palm, for
decorating the native pottery. Among the many toys and
playthings made of rushes we find baskets for wild strawberries
and blaberries, rattles, butterfly cages, fishing nets, caps,
bracelets, belts, hatbands, mock-ceremonial whips, canes and
swords and imitation birds' feet and flowers, some of which are
shown in Fig. 70. Many of them are associated with particular
occasions of the year, for example the imitation flowers with
Easter and the blaerry baskets with Garland Sunday (Chapter
XIX) but in general they are the products of the infinite leisure
of long summer days of cattle-tending in field, bog or mountain.
Probably a number of these objects once had a practical value

308 [text continues on p. 210]

WRACK AND WRECK

222 described as a gathering of the whole people, a time of feasting
461 and festivals and courting. That there was magic as well as
manure in the golden weed is apparent from the urge to possess
some share, however small, of the harvest. In the kingdom of
Mourne 'men would walk three miles to be present at the divi-
sion of the wrack and were content to take back a single creelful
[482] on their backs. They would gather the bits of wrack on their
knees, scraping them up with their hands as though it was gold
dust.¹ Here the division was by lot following a given signal—
in one case a bush hoisted on a tall pole—for the farmers con-
cerned to assemble. Wrack rights and ways of access are some-
times still bitterly fought over though they now have little
meaning.

226 Spring was also the season for gathering other gifts of the
[492] sea, the shellfish and the shell sand which was carted inland
and even taken on horseback for distances of up to thirty miles.
Prized because 'it cut up the clay', it also provided much needed
[241] lime for acid soils. In South Donegal boatloads of mussels used
to be scraped off the rocks with spades and distributed in creels
for spreading on the potato ridges. In Dundalk Bay, Mr. H. G.
Tempest tells me, mussels for the table and for bait are scraped
up from boats with long-handled rakes (Fig. 74). Easter and
Good Friday in particular were times for visiting the shore.
Of the now deserted Blasket Islands Thomas O'Crohan writes:
'it has always been the custom here to go and get kitchen from
the strand to eat on Good Friday.'² Winkles (willucks) were
the favourite food on these occasions, but after St. Patrick's
Day, they say, limpets are better eating than winkles. Shell-
fish were boiled in milk to give food for children and for calves.
Sandeels were pulled up with a bent iron rod or a blunted sickle:
in Mayo 'they are taken on moonlit nights by considerable
gatherings of young people, the object being as much the amuse-
ment as the sandeels'.³ In Donegal 'for scallops and oysters,
[462] when the tide was out, the young women waded into the sea,
some of them naked, and by armfuls brought them to the shore.'⁴

¹E. E. Evans, *Mourne Country*, 144.²T. O'Crohan, *The Islandman*, 29.³C. R. Browne, *Ballycroy*.⁴A. B., *The Russes in 1753*, 201.

[Text continues on p. 226]

XVIII

FAIRS AND GATHERINGS

THE Irish countryman enjoys nothing so much as 'a gathering' of people, and when he is forced to leave his native land he does not willingly settle down away from large urban centres. At home a crowd goes to his head like poteen. The daily routine of life on an isolated farm presents him with few opportunities for seeing people from outside his immediate neighbourhood, and on fine summer evenings his favourite pastime is to throw himself against a roadside ditch with a knot of companions and watch the passers-by. That the remarkably large attendances at rural churches and chapels owe something to the social needs of a scattered population is suggested by the phrase, applied to someone who arrives late at chapel: 'he missed the mass but hit the gathering'—he had something worth while for his trouble. In the Irish laws the freeman's rights of assembly were carefully defined: there were assemblies for transacting legal business (the oireacht), and others for commerce and games (the aenach) which came to be called fairs. With the coming of Christianity the traditional gatherings at sacred sites were transmuted into patterns (pardons), at which the new religion was quickened by practices of the elder faiths. In fact most gatherings served more than one purpose. The secret assemblies of Roman Catholics at 'mass rocks' in penal days no doubt also provided opportunities for social and commercial dealings, and the 'sacrament Sabbaths' of Presbyterian Ulster were great gatherings having something of the nature of fairs. Tents and booths were erected for the occasion, and indeed they were popularly known as 'holy fairs'.

Although the fair has lost something of its former significance in Northern Ireland, thanks to Government marketing schemes